

Assembly Bill No. 1376

CHAPTER 793

An act to amend Section 4600 of the Labor Code, relating to workers' compensation, and declaring the urgency thereof, to take effect immediately.

[Approved by Governor October 13, 2013. Filed with
Secretary of State October 13, 2013.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1376, Roger Hernández. Workers' compensation: medical treatment: interpreters.

Existing law establishes a workers' compensation system, administered by the Administrative Director of the Division of Workers' Compensation, that generally requires employers to secure the payment of workers' compensation for injuries incurred by their employees that arise out of, or in the course of, employment. Existing law requires an employer to provide all medical services reasonably required to cure or relieve the injured worker from the effects of the injury. Under existing law, if the injured employee cannot effectively communicate with his or her treating physician because he or she cannot proficiently speak or understand the English language, the injured employee is entitled to the services of a qualified interpreter during medical treatment appointments. Existing law requires that, to be a qualified interpreter for these purposes, a person meet any requirements established by rule by the administrative director, as specified.

This bill would provide that the requirement that a person meet any requirements established by the administrative director in order to be a qualified interpreter commences on March 1, 2014. This bill would also make technical, nonsubstantive changes.

This bill would declare that it is to take effect immediately as an urgency statute.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 4600 of the Labor Code is amended to read:

4600. (a) Medical, surgical, chiropractic, acupuncture, and hospital treatment, including nursing, medicines, medical and surgical supplies, crutches, and apparatuses, including orthotic and prosthetic devices and services, that is reasonably required to cure or relieve the injured worker from the effects of his or her injury shall be provided by the employer. In the case of his or her neglect or refusal reasonably to do so, the employer is liable for the reasonable expense incurred by or on behalf of the employee in providing treatment.

(b) As used in this division and notwithstanding any other law, medical treatment that is reasonably required to cure or relieve the injured worker from the effects of his or her injury means treatment that is based upon the guidelines adopted by the administrative director pursuant to Section 5307.27.

(c) Unless the employer or the employer's insurer has established or contracted with a medical provider network as provided for in Section 4616, after 30 days from the date the injury is reported, the employee may be treated by a physician of his or her own choice or at a facility of his or her own choice within a reasonable geographic area. A chiropractor shall not be a treating physician after the employee has received the maximum number of chiropractic visits allowed by subdivision (c) of Section 4604.5.

(d) (1) If an employee has notified his or her employer in writing prior to the date of injury that he or she has a personal physician, the employee shall have the right to be treated by that physician from the date of injury if the employee has health care coverage for nonoccupational injuries or illnesses on the date of injury in a plan, policy, or fund as described in subdivisions (b), (c), and (d) of Section 4616.7.

(2) For purposes of paragraph (1), a personal physician shall meet all of the following conditions:

(A) Be the employee's regular physician and surgeon, licensed pursuant to Chapter 5 (commencing with Section 2000) of Division 2 of the Business and Professions Code.

(B) Be the employee's primary care physician and has previously directed the medical treatment of the employee, and who retains the employee's medical records, including his or her medical history. "Personal physician" includes a medical group, if the medical group is a single corporation or partnership composed of licensed doctors of medicine or osteopathy, which operates an integrated multispecialty medical group providing comprehensive medical services predominantly for nonoccupational illnesses and injuries.

(C) The physician agrees to be predesignated.

(3) If the employee has health care coverage for nonoccupational injuries or illnesses on the date of injury in a health care service plan licensed pursuant to Chapter 2.2 (commencing with Section 1340) of Division 2 of the Health and Safety Code, and the employer is notified pursuant to paragraph (1), all medical treatment, utilization review of medical treatment, access to medical treatment, and other medical treatment issues shall be governed by Chapter 2.2 (commencing with Section 1340) of Division 2 of the Health and Safety Code. Disputes regarding the provision of medical treatment shall be resolved pursuant to Article 5.55 (commencing with Section 1374.30) of Chapter 2.2 of Division 2 of the Health and Safety Code.

(4) If the employee has health care coverage for nonoccupational injuries or illnesses on the date of injury in a group health insurance policy as described in Section 4616.7, all medical treatment, utilization review of medical treatment, access to medical treatment, and other medical treatment issues shall be governed by the applicable provisions of the Insurance Code.

(5) The insurer may require prior authorization of any nonemergency treatment or diagnostic service and may conduct reasonably necessary utilization review pursuant to Section 4610.

(6) An employee shall be entitled to all medically appropriate referrals by the personal physician to other physicians or medical providers within the nonoccupational health care plan. An employee shall be entitled to treatment by physicians or other medical providers outside of the nonoccupational health care plan pursuant to standards established in Article 5 (commencing with Section 1367) of Chapter 2.2 of Division 2 of the Health and Safety Code.

(e) (1) When at the request of the employer, the employer's insurer, the administrative director, the appeals board, or a workers' compensation administrative law judge, the employee submits to examination by a physician, he or she shall be entitled to receive, in addition to all other benefits herein provided, all reasonable expenses of transportation, meals, and lodging incident to reporting for the examination, together with one day of temporary disability indemnity for each day of wages lost in submitting to the examination.

(2) Regardless of the date of injury, "reasonable expenses of transportation" includes mileage fees from the employee's home to the place of the examination and back at the rate of twenty-one cents (\$0.21) a mile or the mileage rate adopted by the Director of Human Resources pursuant to Section 19820 of the Government Code, whichever is higher, plus any bridge tolls. The mileage and tolls shall be paid to the employee at the time he or she is given notification of the time and place of the examination.

(f) When at the request of the employer, the employer's insurer, the administrative director, the appeals board, or a workers' compensation administrative law judge, an employee submits to examination by a physician and the employee does not proficiently speak or understand the English language, he or she shall be entitled to the services of a qualified interpreter in accordance with conditions and a fee schedule prescribed by the administrative director. These services shall be provided by the employer. For purposes of this section, "qualified interpreter" means a language interpreter certified, or deemed certified, pursuant to Article 8 (commencing with Section 11435.05) of Chapter 4.5 of Part 1 of Division 3 of Title 2 of, or Section 68566 of, the Government Code.

(g) If the injured employee cannot effectively communicate with his or her treating physician because he or she cannot proficiently speak or understand the English language, the injured employee is entitled to the services of a qualified interpreter during medical treatment appointments. To be a qualified interpreter for purposes of medical treatment appointments, an interpreter is not required to meet the requirements of subdivision (f), but commencing March 1, 2014, shall meet any requirements established by rule by the administrative director that are substantially similar to the requirements set forth in Section 1367.04 of the Health and Safety Code, notwithstanding any other effective date established in regulations. The administrative director shall adopt a fee schedule for qualified interpreter

fees in accordance with this section. Upon request of the injured employee, the employer or insurance carrier shall pay for interpreter services. An employer shall not be required to pay for the services of an interpreter who is not certified or is provisionally certified by the person conducting the medical treatment or examination unless either the employer consents in advance to the selection of the individual who provides the interpreting service or the injured worker requires interpreting service in a language other than the languages designated pursuant to Section 11435.40 of the Government Code.

(h) Home health care services shall be provided as medical treatment only if reasonably required to cure or relieve the injured employee from the effects of his or her injury and prescribed by a physician and surgeon licensed pursuant to Chapter 5 (commencing with Section 2000) of Division 2 of the Business and Professions Code, and subject to Section 5307.1 or 5703.8. The employer shall not be liable for home health care services that are provided more than 14 days prior to the date of the employer's receipt of the physician's prescription.

SEC. 2. This act is an urgency statute necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety within the meaning of Article IV of the Constitution and shall go into immediate effect. The facts constituting the necessity are:

In order to avoid jeopardizing injured workers' access to medically necessary services, it is necessary that this bill take effect immediately.